



THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

Israel's Inelegant Options in Judea and Samaria

Withdrawal, Annexation, and Conflict Management

Yaakov Amidror



**THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES
BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY**

Mideast Security and Policy Studies No. 129

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www.besacenter.org
ISSN 0793-1042
April 2017

Cover image: Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is unlikely that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be resolved soon. Nevertheless, the principled question of how it *ought* to be resolved should be discussed, to shape today's policies in accordance with the preferred solution of the future.

From the perspective of the Jewish public in Israel, there are two basic approaches to resolution of the conflict:

1. Establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. This approach would mean that if conflict continues, it would be conducted between two sovereign political entities whose new relationship would be based on the agreement signed between them following negotiations leading to this outcome.
2. Application of Israeli sovereignty over Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) and the creation of a binational state (in practice). There are several approaches to the citizenship of Palestinians living in the territories that will be annexed, ranging from full citizenship in the Israeli state to the provision of Jordanian citizenship in some sort of condominium relationship.

There is also the (extremely likely) possibility of maintaining the current status quo situation, without establishment of a Palestinian state or extension of Israeli sovereignty to the territories. This involves continued Israeli military control of the overall West Bank and Gaza security envelope,

alongside Palestinian Authority control over most of the Palestinian population in Judea and Samaria and continued Hamas control of Gaza.

However, this situation of “conflict management” seems to be a temporary situation, in which Israel will be under continuous pressure for change and for movement towards a “final” settlement. And thus, continuation of the status quo does not relieve Israel of the need to discuss the eventual status of the territories.

Among the Jewish citizens of Israel, the issue is debated on two levels:

On the ideological level: The right-wing argument is that a nation cannot and should not give up its ancestral land just because it is hard to control. When you waive a right, you waive its justification, thereby losing the sole reason for the establishment of a Jewish state in this region. "Zionism" without "Zion" does not hold water. By contrast, the left-wing argument in favor of a two-state solution is based on the premise that occupation corrupts. It is immoral and a critical violation of Palestinians' rights, turning Israel into a "jailor state" that will be consumed from within, because Jewish society inevitably will buckle under the "banality of occupation."

On the practical level: Two-state advocates emphasize the inability to sustain Israel's democracy without granting citizenship to 2.5 million Palestinians; and yet if citizenship is granted, Israel will no longer be a Jewish state – even if it is able to continue to exist with such a large minority. On the other hand, proponents of “Broader Israel” claim that a Palestinian state will bring Hamas or ISIS to Israel’s doorstep. The damage that Hezbollah could inflict upon Israel from Lebanon pales in comparison to the destruction that a Palestinian state could wreak from just over the Green Line; from firing positions a few kilometers from the Knesset and 25 kilometers from Tel Aviv.

This study presents the arguments of all sides in this debate. It concludes that the Right has no sound response to the demographic argument against annexation, while the Left has no serious solution to the security threat stemming from Palestinian statehood.

Therefore, Israel must choose the lesser evil. Israel’s choices are not a matter of right or wrong, but of electing to assume one set of risks over the other.

This study also finds that unilateral initiatives on Israel's part – whether unilateral annexation of all or part of the West Bank, or unilateral withdrawals from all or parts of the West Bank – would be the most serious error of all. This is because unilateral moves will entail a very high domestic price for Israel, while earning Israel very few gains in diplomatic and defense terms.

In fact, the conditions that pertain in the Middle East today militate against dramatic Israeli moves. The Arab world is in a state of violent chaos which requires effective and complete Israeli control of the West Bank for what may be a very long time. At the same time, any move towards formal annexation will wreck the ability of Israel to enhance relations with the important Sunni countries, and might even lead to another bloody intifada.

Therefore, Palestinian statehood is not the real question currently before decision-makers. Rather, the question is whether Israel aspires to leave open the possibility of future negotiations towards a two-state solution, or it will act towards closing this option by expanding isolated settlements and entering an unstoppable process towards a binational state situation.

All the approaches discussed in this study pose significant challenges to Israel's future. It is therefore critical that a significant majority of Israelis – as large a consensus as possible – unite behind whatever approach is opted for by Israel's leadership, to prevent a schism in the country.

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INTRODUCTION

Israel will soon be marking the jubilee of the Six Day War in 1967. Nostalgia for the pre-war period, for the days of "the good old little State of Israel" is sure to be intensified. This nostalgia will be expressed in a supposedly-clear and reasoned fashion, especially among the old Israeli elites, with the media embellishing stories on how good and innocent everything was "back then," certainly compared to the present. The change for the worse, it will be claimed, stems from the "Occupation," a deleterious development that is "devastating" the State of Israel.

This is likely to be the main theme used by acolytes of the old establishment and the liberal media. This reconstruction conveniently omits mention of the popular saying in 1967, on the eve of war, that "the last person leaving the country – shouldn't forget to turn off the lights." In other words, few, if any, among these elites, will recall the tense atmosphere in Israel on the eve of the Six Day War due to the country's small size and narrow waistline. Indeed, not all were confident that the 19-year old state would survive that impending war.

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For the same reason – in order to draw support from an imagined past – it is to be expected that Israel's contemporary political right-wing will exaggerate the descriptions of anxiety felt in 1967 in order to emphasize the contribution of Israel's post Six Day War expansion to its security. The right-wing will argue that the "Occupation" saved Israel from annihilation. Moreover, the Right will emphasize the importance of the return to the Jewish People's ancestral land, "the foundation of Israel's existence" – as if prior to the Six Day War, Israel wasn't growing in strength nor bursting with a sense of rejuvenation.

In retrospect, the Six Day War was a major milestone in the process of recognition and acceptance by Arab countries of Israel's existence and of its strength. In its aftermath, the entire world – including many within Israeli society – came to realize that the Arabs could not destroy Israel militarily; and the final proof of this was provided by Israel's victory in the Yom Kippur War six years later. In short, the 1967 war transformed the atmosphere and added (perhaps excessive) confidence and pride to the citizens of Israel and Jewish communities around the world.

Interestingly, until the Six Day War, only a small, marginal group of former Irgun members – concentrated within the Herut movement, alongside former Lechi members outside Herut – advocated the "two banks to the Jordan" vision, meaning that Israel should take possession of ancestral lands both east and west of the Jordan River.

The minimalists among them stressed the necessity to return at least to eastern Jerusalem, and to the Temple Mount, the site of the Temple, at its heart, and to biblical sites across Judea and Samaria (which the world calls the "West Bank"). When this (small) group went up to Mount Zion to point to the Temple Mount, of which only the tip of the golden Dome of the Rock could be seen, to remember and reminisce, Religious Zionists were not among them.

In those days, Religious Zionist activists would recall Gush Etzion, at the most, and point from Kibbutz Ramat Rachel at Jerusalem's southern edge to the "Lone Tree" in the destroyed Gush Etzion settlements. (These are towns that were obliterated by the Jordanians during Israel's War of Independence).

This situation changed after the Six Day War, and especially after the Yom Kippur War, which brought forth a religious movement exhibiting a strong messianic tone – the Gush Emunim (Block of the Faithful) movement. This group perceived the return of Jews to the Old City of Jerusalem and other biblical sites as another significant step in the "redemption process," and it transformed "settlement" in these areas into a core religious and social endeavor.

This process gained momentum in the wake of the 1977 political upheaval, with the rise to power of the secular Right headed by Menachem Begin. Begin formed a coalition with the National Religious Party (NRP). Some NRP leaders were also the leaders of Gush Emunim.

From the onset, there were those in Israel who, in opposition to Begin's Likud and the NRP, felt that the resident Palestinians of those territories should be allowed to establish an independent state. They argued even then that annexing so many Arabs to Israel would be a disaster. But the active advocates of this position constituted a minority even among the Israeli Left. Those who advocated for an independent Palestinian state were considered "Radical Left" and their gravity in Israeli politics was negligible.

For many years, their argument against continued Israeli control of the West Bank and Gaza was unconvincing to most Israelis, in part because among Arab countries and leaders no-one was willing to "pay", namely, to agree to political considerations in return for these territories.

The Khartoum Conference resolutions of August 1967 against any negotiations with Israel reminded Israelis of the Arab refusal to accept the UN Partition Plan of November 1947. This allowed Israel to discount the Arab side, as they would not even speak to representatives of the State of Israel. The "No Partner" perception shaped the worldview of many Israelis for many years, and enabled Gush Emunim (and Israeli governments, especially after 1977) to establish settlements in Judea and Samaria with almost no substantial public opposition, even from those who opposed Gush Emunim's messianic sentiment.

Over time, the "Palestinian state" proposal, as a political solution to Israel's demographic dilemma – to avoid control over millions of Palestinians who could overturn the Jewish majority in Israel – increasingly became

mainstreamed in Israeli thought. Eventually, it was adopted by the Mapai Party in its modern-day Labor Party form. Yet this change did not result in practice in a separation between the peoples, because there was no serious framework of negotiation between Israel and the Palestinians.

In 1993, following the agreements reached between the PLO and Israeli government officials in Oslo, it seemed that a significant change was in the making. But in the years following the agreement, the Palestinian side perpetrated appalling acts of terrorism, resulting in a higher number of victims than prior to the historical compromise that was supposedly reached in that agreement. The Oslo process thus became viewed as a colossal failure with dire costs.

The Palestinians, of course, blamed Israel for failure of the accord. But this study considers matters from the Israeli perspective, and thus it can be stated clearly that the failure of the Oslo process contributed to the difficulty of reaching a comprehensive agreement with the Palestinians. Given the bloody toll of the Oslo Accords, it would be difficult to expect a repeat by Israel of a move that might exact a cost similar or even greater in severity. And so, while in recent years Israel's Likud prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has accepted the "two states" construct as a long-term goal, no concrete progress towards such a "solution" has been made.

This study was written against the background of the current situation, 23 years after the signing of the Oslo Accords and a few months before the Six Day War jubilee. It is not about the reasons for the current diplomatic deadlock, but rather about Israel's diplomatic options going forward.

The question is clear: What is preferable for Israel going forward?

Should Israel continue towards a single state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, that would be binational in practice; or to work towards the division of the land, namely the establishment of a Palestinian state in Judea, Samaria (and Gaza), alongside Israel?

This study was written so that in the many discussions that will take place in future, the arguments of both sides in this difficult debate – which is dividing Jewish society, in Israel and abroad – will be on the table in a clear, precise manner.

I do not claim that one of these two options – a one-state or a two-state solution – is possible now or will be possible soon. Rather the question at hand is one of principle, unrelated to the practicality of these “solutions” in the foreseeable future. Even those who do not see any possibility of an agreement at present must immediately address the questions I raise, because Israel's current conduct on the ground (mainly, but not exclusively, regarding settlement building policy) willy-nilly will be determined by the relevant long-term prism.

The situation is complex, laden with historical, moral, religious, demographic, legal, cultural and social undercurrents. Among other, its complexity stems from the fact that the conflict of Jews and Palestinians is unique. No other nation in the world besides the Jews claim ownership and sovereignty over a land it left or was expelled from 2,000 years ago.

The origin of the conflict with the Palestinians, as defined by Zionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky in his 1923 article "The Iron Wall," is that it is natural for residents of a land to oppose the arrival of foreigners, who aim to control parts, or the whole, of the country. Jews are "foreigners" in the eyes of the Palestinians. This fundamental reality should be internalized, as its evasion tends to lead to false understandings and solutions.

The conflict between Israel and the Arabs, and between Israel and the Palestinians, is multifaceted. The most prominent dimension of the conflict is the national level, namely the conflict over control of a defined area of land. But equally important is the religious dimension, whose weight has momentarily increased in recent years (and by the admission of one of the instigators of the Oslo process, was never considered in Oslo).

In the Islamic concept of territory, the so-called state of Israel is part of "Waqf land," so there is no possibility that Muslims would consent to its domination by people of another religion. The inverse claim is also made by some on the Jewish side of the conflict. The religious arguments make the conflict more problematic, as no one holds the “right” to waive a divine religious commandment.

Beyond the national and religious themes lies the broader conflict of the Jews in their land vis à vis "the Arab nation" that straddles the land mass from the Strait of Gibraltar to Iran, with the State of Israel as a wedge in

its midst. Since the Islamic conquest of the region in the seventh century, only during the Crusader kingdom period was movement westward and eastward across the "Arab nation" blocked, as is the situation nowadays, due to the existence of the Jewish state in the region. The "Arab nation" has found it difficult to accept this reality piercing its heart. It is no wonder that many Arabs equate Jews with Crusaders, hoping and vowing that the former will share the fate of the latter.

In the recent period, an extra dimension was added to this level, with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict constituting another aspect of the deep anger and resentment harbored by Muslims, especially Arabs, towards the West. Anger – for ignoring their importance in history, for belittling their contributions to humanity, for not considering their interests, and, according to many, for humiliating the Mohammedan religion.

Per this view, the Palestinian struggle is another sign of the violent – yet justified by many Muslims – struggle for recognition of Islam by the Western world, as manifested in Europe and other countries around the world. Israel is perceived in this context as an "outpost" of the West, in the eyes of those surrounding it (and by a significant part of Israelis themselves).

Recently, a former prime minister of a European country told this author that only of late he realized how important Israel was to the curtailing of radical Islam – which threatens to his continent, too. He meant this as a positive acknowledgment of Israel's value to the West, but it also is an explanation of the fact that Israel is anathema to the Arabs and many Muslims.

It is important to emphasize that contrary to the belief of many, especially among Western world leaders, an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians will not significantly ameliorate the problems plaguing the contemporary Middle East. The Middle East is aflame due to a historical conflict reignited between Sunnis and Shia, and as result of the existential struggle over the spirit of the Middle East, between radical Islamic elements and the modern establishment.

Atop of this is the incapacity of most Arab countries in the region to ensure a dignified and safe existence for their citizens and for their offspring, in conditions of a harsh and degrading existence, under some level or

other of authoritarian rule. This is a major, critical factor in the region's deterioration and its complexity. These grand civilizational and structural problems will not be resolved just because Israel and the Palestinians might sign a peace accord.

Therefore, for the purposes of this study, our discussion is limited to the narrow, precise context of a possible peace agreement on the lives of Palestinians and Israelis. The only external impact beyond this relationship we shall consider relates to ties between Israel and Sunni Arab states who wish to preserve the *status quo*, and who seek strong, regional support.

In fact, the foolish belief that an Israeli-Palestinian agreement would bring relief to the broader Middle East, and would lead to a dramatically different relationship between Israel and the Arab countries – is detrimental to the process between Israel and the Palestinians. It retards progress, because it allows Palestinians to think, arrogantly and erroneously, that the key to Israel's relations with Arab countries lies in their hands.

Because of such deleterious thinking, Palestinians seem to demand a higher and higher price for peace with Israel; again, thinking that their demands are paramount and are the linchpin for all regional outcomes. It follows that the world will heighten pressure on Israel to be more flexible in view of the broad impact that an Israeli-Palestinian accord supposedly would have. In other words, by misjudging and overstating a potential agreement's impact, peacemaking is done a disservice. It pushes peace father off. The greater the (false) importance attributed to an agreement, the smaller are its chances of coming into effect.

The complexity described above is not a matter of excessive optimism or pessimism, but rather a reality that needs to be acknowledged prior to holding any serious discussion about the possibility for a solution and its ability to endure.

Ever since the Six Day War, it has been suggested that the problem can be resolved by transferring the territories occupied (or liberated) in 1967 to Palestinian rule. Per this concept, the creation of such a state (which would be an historical first, since no Palestinian state ever existed) should solve the problem, or at least enable it to take other forms more favorable to Israel.

Advocates of this approach ignore the fact that the PLO was already established and active against Israel in 1964 – long before the Six Day War, when Palestinians certainly did not plan to take only Judea, Samaria and Gaza. At that time, these territories were controlled by Jordan and Egypt, and no Arab factor recognized Israel's 1949 borders nor considered establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza only.

Moreover, in recent years, in many encounters worldwide with Palestinian intellectuals – individuals considered relatively "moderate" since they agreed to meet for talks with Israelis – these Palestinians have admitted that for them the fundamental problem was not the Israeli victory of 1967, called the *Naksa*. For them, the roots of the conflict lie in the Palestinian's terrible defeat of 1948, known to them as the *Nakba*, "the Catastrophe," which the Palestinians consider as comparable to the Holocaust. In other words, for them, the real, troubling issue is the very establishment of the State of Israel rather than its size. This, too, should be kept in mind, so as not to get hooked on a "solution" which disregards the problems arising from the *Nakba* for an agreement that covers *Naksa* issues only.

Jabotinsky wrote that "the Iron Wall" was a necessary, but not ultimate, approach in dealing with the Arab-Israel conflict. After the "Iron Wall" stance filled its purpose, he wrote, namely forcing the Arabs to despair of their ability to destroy the Jewish state in the Land of Israel, there would be need to find a solution that would allow both peoples to live side by side.

Thus we must today ask: Has "the Iron Wall" strategy fulfilled its role? Or, perhaps the Arabs (still) want an agreement only to better prepare for the next stage in ensuring the destruction of Israel? There is no doubt that this is an important question which will surface as a consideration in the views of both advocates and opponents of a two-state approach.

This study refrains from expressing an opinion about a "correct" solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In fact, it is uncertain whether a solution exists that can solve all problems for both sides of the conflict. Instead, this study presents the arguments for and against the two main approaches towards a solution. By "solution" we mean a settlement that should move

the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians to another plane – either to relations between two groups of citizens within a single state, or to relations between two states. In other words, a settlement involves either the annexation of Judea and Samaria to Israel, or a settlement involves a Palestinian state neighboring Israel.

This study references the West Bank, not Gaza, since the Palestinians in Gaza already have achieved almost full sovereignty. In the future, Gaza clearly will need to be discussed, as a standalone issue or in the context of an agreement relating to the West Bank. However, a discussion about Gaza at this point only adds "noise" that interferes with the discussion of a solution in Judea and Samaria, which is a complex issue in and of itself.

This is the point to note that some argue that the Palestinians already have been granted independence of a sort, given the fact the Palestinian Authority established under the Oslo Accords is self-governing. Only security matters remain under Israeli control. But I consider this to be a minimalist definition of independence, and believe that the subjective feeling of Palestinians as a people under occupation is justified, even if in practice Israel's occupation is very minimal in scope.

Until the conflict is resolved, a decision must be reached about what needs be done to promote Israel's interests over what could be a very prolonged interim period. Yet it is important to understand that even a delay in reaching an agreement cannot allow Israel to avoid a decision on the correct approach over the long term; namely, what agreement Israel should *aspire* to. To conduct itself correctly at present, Israel must already determine whether it prefers a single state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, or two states crowded together in this space.

THE BROADER ISRAEL APPROACH

Advocates of a broader or “greater” Israel approach make arguments of a religious-ideological hue, as well as security contentions. For most protagonists on the political Right, the ideological issues are the heart of the matter, with the security arguments a secondary consideration.

The arguments are as follows:

The Claim of Right

The return of the Jews to Israel derives from the perception, understanding and belief that the Land of Israel belongs to the People of Israel. This right holds for the entire Land of Israel, but is clearly more deeply-entrenched in Schem (Nablus), Hebron and Jerusalem than in Tel Aviv and Haifa. Thus the relinquishing of Judea and Samaria will detract from the legitimacy of the Jews' status not only pertaining to this area but to the Land of Israel as a whole.

Without basing the demand for establishing the modern State of Israel precisely in the cradle of the Jewish homeland, Zionism is reduced to a colonial movement by a group of people who aspired to improve their living conditions at the expense of the indigenous residents of the land. Without the claim for a right – there is no right. On the other hand, when one considers the fact that the Jews were expelled from their ancestral homeland approximately two thousand years ago, and that they established themselves as a nation in the Land of Israel over 1,500 years earlier, and that they maintained a continuous physical presence in the land, however small, ever since the elimination of Jewish sovereignty by the Romans – well, then, Israel's legitimacy has deep roots.

For this reason, practically all the modern Zionist forefathers insisted on the necessity of establishing Jews' sovereignty here, in the Land of Israel and in no other place in the world. This view united religious and secular Jews, and was insisted upon by secular Zionist leaders like Chaim Weizmann.

This argument relates mainly to Jerusalem, and the Temple Mount at its center, as a kind of anchor tying the rights of all Jews to the Land of Israel. It posits a profound connection between "Zionism" and "Zion".

Palestinians understand this. Their representative in Beirut once stated this explicitly when referring to the need to move Israel to cede the Temple Mount – as a decisive step that would affect the Jewish people's self-perception regarding their (lack of) rights over the entire land. Similarly, Palestinian religious clerics recently refused to sign a joint document with Israeli rabbis (hailing from the moderate wing of Religious Zionism), since it contained mention of the Jews in

connection with the Temple Mount, to which they objected, even when this was only alluded to in the document.

When Ben-Gurion appeared before an international commission on the future of the Land of Israel he brandished his *Kushan* (ownership deed) – the Bible – as the basis for the claim of the People of Israel on the Land of Israel. This *Kushan* is instructive of the ties to the land as a whole, and especially to Judea and Samaria.

With all due respect to the coastal cities of Tel Aviv and Haifa and the kibbutzim in the peripheral areas, were Israel to withdraw from the mountain ridge, it would be relinquishing its ownership deed to the Land of Israel.

In addition, archaeological finds of recent decades are unequivocal about the Jewish People's undeniable presence in this land for thousands of years, especially in the mountain area.

In short, one cannot cede significant parts of the only Home for the Jews just because it is sometimes uncomfortable to hold on to the land, or because the fact of Israel's ownership of the land is frowned upon its neighbors or by the world.

For those whom this right is not only an historical claim but one founded on a religious heritage, it is obvious that no permission has been granted to relinquish the land bestowed upon the People of Israel by God. In this view, the connection between the Land and the People of Israel is stronger and more substantial than would appear from a cursory glance. As Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the first chief rabbi of British-mandatory Palestine, wrote:

The Land of Israel is not an external entity, superimposed upon the nation, defined merely as a means for the general unifying of the people and the presumption of the nation's physical or even spiritual existence. The Land of Israel is an independent entity, intrinsically connected to the nation, and bound by concealed virtues to its very existence.

In plainer, less poetic terms, this means that anyone attempting to separate the People from the Land will fail, since they are inseparable, both practically and in principle and in spiritual terms.

Consider this recent editorial in the *Olam Katan* Torah newsletter – a pamphlet distributed in synagogues, representing the views of an ultra-nationalist Religious Zionist stream that is currently part of the Bayit Hayehudi political party. Addressing young adults, it wrote: "According to the Torah, the People of Israel cannot voluntarily impart sovereign power on a foreign people over the Land of Israel." In other words, from a religious standpoint, there is no room for discussion, since man cannot alter divine commandments, and Jewish law on this matter is absolutely clear.

In short, the fundamental and principled argument is that relinquishing the "claim of right" pulls the rug out from under all other claims supporting the existence of the State of Israel. Without assertion of this right, there is no moral justification, and thus no political justification, for the existence of Israel as a Jewish state in the historic Land of Israel or for the sacrificing of Jewish and Arab lives for this cause.

Indeed, the Israeli poet Uri Zvi Greenberg stated tearfully in the aftermath of the Six Day War that the decision to refrain from exercising full Israeli sovereignty over the Temple Mount and to leave it under the jurisdiction of foreign powers (i.e., the Jordanian Waqf, a decision of then-Defense Minister Moshe Dayan) was be a disastrous decision with ramifications for Jewish control over the Land of Israel. Without an anchor, he was suggesting, the ship of state has no recourse but to drift.

The Historical Claim

There has never been a Palestinian state, claim the Broader Israel proponents, and there is no reason to build one now. In fact, the Palestinian people is a fiction, a recent invention designed to rally the masses across the Middle East against the Jews.

The famous American author, Mark Twain, visited the Holy Land in 1867 (fifteen years before the first major wave of modern Jewish immigration, known as the First Aliyah, and 31 years prior to the First Zionist Congress). He recounted the visit in his book *The Innocents Abroad*, an objective report of a foreign visitor. From his account, no Palestinian people was in existence or in the making at the time, neither was there any inkling that the isolated groups he met in the awful wilderness he describes would develop into a people.

At no stage in history did the Arab population living in the Land of Israel show a desire for a state of its own. These Arabs did not define themselves as a people or as a distinct group within the Arab world. They have no distinct language, religion, culture, or land distinct and separate from the "Arab nation" spread across the Levant. In fact, the area which the Palestinians refer to as their homeland was not even given a name in Arabic. "Palestine" is a Greek word adopted by the Romans and later by the British, and now by the Arabs of the Land of Israel. During British rule, Jews and Arabs alike were called "Palestinians."

The Balfour Declaration (1917), adopted by the League of Nations (the forerunner of the UN), speaks of "a national home for the Jewish people" and the preservation of the civil and religious rights of "the non-Jewish communities in Palestine," since there was no Palestinian people to refer to. The birth certificate of a person born under pre-state British rule stated "Palestinian," even for Jews. The uniforms of Jewish volunteers to the British army during the Second World War were inscribed with "Palestine," as were the uniforms of Arabs hailing from areas under the British Mandate.

Similarly, *The Palestine Post* was a Jewish-Zionist newspaper renamed in 1950 *The Jerusalem Post*. (Ironically, Mahmoud Abbas recently presented a copy of *The Palestine Post* to the Saudi King, thinking that the name proved a connection to Palestine for the Arabs who call themselves "Palestinians.") Even Arab nationalists, who laid down the infrastructure for Arab independence after the First World War, did not envision a separate entity in what was called Palestine by the British.

To quote the eminent historian Philip Hitti to the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine (1946): "There is no such thing as Palestine in history, absolutely not." Or the words of extreme Israeli Arab nationalist Azmi Bishara: "I do not think there is a Palestinian people. There is [only] an Arab nation (*Umma*)."

There is thus no reason for Israel to concede, to disregard the history of the Jewish People, or to jeopardize its security, in order to fulfill the aspirations of an invention without historical foundation, "a people" raised as a counter-argument against the rule of Jews in their ancient homeland.

Furthermore, advocates of Broader Israel assert that the "self-definition" of those self-proclaimed "Palestinians" has a genuine expression – in the Kingdom of Jordan. If a new national consciousness had been created which can be called the "Palestinian people" – and this is now an undeniable fact, even though it is not entrenched in distant or recent history – then this people indeed has already been granted national expression in Jordan, where Palestinians make-up two-thirds of the population.

Solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should take all this into account. Palestinians in Judea and Samaria can have Jordanian citizenship (as was the case until the year 1988). There is no reason for the Palestinians not to realize their aspiration for sovereignty within the framework of the Arab countries that are home to their own people, and especially in Jordan. And it is worth noting that, historically, Transjordan was established on 80% of the area granted to the Zionist movement by the League of Nations as a mandate for the establishment of a Jewish national home. It was artificially and unilaterally cut-away by the British and given to the Hashemites in gratitude to Britain's First World War ally, the Emir Abdullah of Mecca.

In short, there is no difference between so-called "Palestinians" and "Jordanians," or even other Arab nations. There is a big disparity between the so-called "Palestinians" in Gaza and those who are allegedly their brothers in the West Bank than there are differences between the residents of Judea and Samaria and their brethren in Jordan. So, the link created between the West Bank and Gaza is a fabrication within the larger fabrication. The result sought by the proponents of a Palestinian state is actually two Arab states, Jordan and Palestine, and a Jewish state in the remaining area. This essentially would be a solution of "three states for two peoples," if one accepts the existence of a Palestinian people. This is an unacceptable absurdity.

The Security Claim

Experience shows that no security is achieved without ground control ("boots on the ground").

Israel put this issue to the test in the period following the signing of the Oslo Accords. The result was a clear, total collapse of the agreement within a decade of its signing, with 122 Israelis killed in one month in the spring of 2002. At a calculated annual rate this would amount to around 1,500 dead!

This is no surprise, since Yasser Arafat and his followers saw, and still see, the Oslo Accords as a stepping stone in the "Phased Plan" towards the destruction of Israel.

Even when Israel made a unilateral decision to withdraw completely from Gaza (2005), the result was terrorism, attack tunnels burrowed into Israel and rockets launched onto its cities. So why repeat the same mistake for the third time? Withdrawal from the West Bank would lead to its rule by Hamas in Gaza style or even to Islamic State rule. No one can guarantee that this will not be the result should the IDF lose control of the area. The security outcome would be catastrophic.

It would be easy to bring Israel to a standstill by firing upon it from the mountains that dominate the coastal plain, into the heartland of the truncated Jewish state. Almost the entire area can be surveyed from the mountain ridges of Judea and Samaria, so that direct, precision targeting of key installations in central Israel is possible. Even attack tunnels into the heartland of the country could become a threat.

US security proposals for an Israeli West Bank withdrawal illuminate how reckless withdrawal would be. American proposals, such as those made public following the Kerry initiative in 2014, and the joint Israeli-American initiative presented in July 2016 (which is a detailed, serious proposal, with Maj. Gen. (res.) Gadi Shamni leading the work on the Israeli side), are disconnected from the reality of life here, taking no account of changes in the Middle East, geography, topography and regional culture.

They contain nice words but no solutions on the tough issues. These proposals will not be worth the paper upon which they are written if/when Judea and Samaria falls under Hamas rule or Jordan falls to a Palestinian majority or Muslim Brotherhood rule. Alas, these proposals are but an example of a willingness to endanger the security of Israel, just so long as an agreement – any agreement! – is reached with the Palestinians.

After all the hard work invested by the best American professionals and Israeli officers, these proposals prove that there is no substitute, nor can there be, for full Israeli security control of the territory, with "boots on the ground." Only Israeli control of the area can contend with present needs and future threats.

Furthermore, the notion of an independent but demilitarized Palestinian state is an anachronism. Such a demilitarized state might have been possible when the security threat stemmed from tanks and planes – which could be denied to the Palestinian state. But in an age of missiles, rockets, UAVs, and other weapons that can be used to foment terrorism, an independent state could produce all it needs within its own factories in Palestinian cities without the IDF being able to act against them, even if it had intelligence capabilities (and it will not). This is the advantage of a sovereign state, even if it would be ostensibly forbidden to build an army.

Commitments to demilitarization never have withstood the test of reality elsewhere in the world, and there is no reason to suppose that a commitment to non-militarization would be upheld by the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria.

Moreover, what if Hamas wins in free elections and rules the West Bank, and decides as part of a change in Palestinian policy to seek a revision of the agreed-upon limitations to reach softer regulations, or to cancel the limitations? What if, for example, it demands, as a sovereign state, to have US or other "peacekeeping" forces withdrawn from its border with Jordan. Could an American president withstand the demand of a sovereign state to remove US troops from its territory? Probably not, and certainly if these forces come under daily attacks resulting in occasional fatalities.

With the partition of the land, Israel would be rendered so vulnerable and so incapable of self-defense, that it would be logical and tempting to attack it. Not only would Israel's withdrawal prevent it from defending itself, but a situation would be created whereby the other side will conclude that conditions are ripe for Israel's destruction, and thus attacks on Israel will increase. Thus the existence of a Palestinian state will increase exponentially the danger of additional wars breaking out.

To conclude: With the IDF no longer on the ground, the information that is generated by the contacts with the population will lessen, intelligence will weaken, the IDF will lose the ability of immediate response to nip threats in the bud, the capabilities to harm Israel will be developed on sovereign territory, and Israel will be taken by surprise every time. The proposed borders, the indefensible 1949 ceasefire borders, would only invite attack on Israel. The result will be a war with Israel's home front literally on the front line.

Most advocates of Broader Israel understand the severe demographic significance of their approach, and they have six different ways of relating to this problem, as follows:

1. Some fringe elements count on a cataclysm sometime in the unforeseen future that would lead to voluntary or forced emigration of many or most Palestinians, thus diluting the number of Palestinians living in the West Bank. Most Israelis consider this an impractical and even unethical dream, so it should not be counted as a realistic policy.
2. Others argue for a costly effort to encourage Palestinian emigration, primarily by means of generous financial support for migrants. (Stipends of \$50,000 have been suggested). Leaving aside the moral question, it seems unlikely that this method could prompt migration on a scale which would have a practical impact on the demographic question. The costs also would be staggering. The payout to 100,000 families would cost at least \$5 billion, and could reach \$25 or \$30 billion for half a million families. Such an effort would not necessarily be immoral or illegal, but it certainly seems unfeasible and cost ineffective. And why would so many Palestinians agree to emigrate?
3. A third group of Broader Israel ideologues claim that the appropriate arrangement is to control the entire territory, and afford Palestinians whatever rights they deserve through Jordanian citizenship, as was the case prior to 1988. The problem here is that neither the Jordanians nor the Palestinians want this, and it is difficult to see how this can be implemented without the cooperation of both parties.
4. Others suggest that Palestinians can make do with autonomy, within a single Israeli state that spans from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. Autonomy was proposed by Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin as part of the Israel-Egypt peace treaty of 1979. But such an arrangement has no precedent in the world, and, alas, it smells to foreign observers much like the Bantustan arrangements in apartheid South Africa.
5. Others argue that the demographic problem should be resolved by integrating Palestinian Arabs into the Jewish state. This can be done incrementally and cautiously, with an eye to uprooting Palestinian incitement against Jews and the Jewish state and educating

Palestinians towards better values. Within two or three generations, the Arabs will arrive at the understanding that it is in their interest to live under Jewish rule and even to participate in the Israeli political system with equal rights. This approach involves a complex and difficult process with dangers that should not be underestimated, yet it is just and moral approach.

6. Finally, there are those who will not acknowledge that they are aiming for a single state, saying that since it is impossible to reach an agreement under current conditions, and therefore one must do the utmost to make life easier for the Palestinians as part of preserving the status quo. In other words, the vast majority of Palestinians will continue to live under Palestinian (Authority) rule, which is not formal statehood. This could offer Palestinians better employment options (including some employment in Israel), some freedom of movement, and some freedom of entry and exit. In short, Palestinians could achieve significant improvement in their personal situation without progress towards a formal state of their own; a state that anyway is impractical. In fact, this prolongation of the status quo is designed to make it impossible to establish a Palestinian state.

CRITICISM OF THE BROADER ISRAEL APPROACH

An initial, principled criticism of the proposal that could lead to a binational state relates to the ability to amend critical errors.

Proponents of the two-state solution argue that while they may be mistaken and a Palestinian state could turn out to be a disaster, the annexation of the West Bank and establishment of a so-called "Broader Israel" would be worse – since Israel's ability to contend with these two potential disasters is not the same. If it turns out that a Palestinian state is a threat to Israel, Israel can eliminate the threat and even reconquer the territories if need be. This would be a difficult, but possible, scenario. However, formation of a binational state is a one-way ticket to irrevocable disaster. Since a question mark hangs over each of the two solutions, it is preferable to choose a reversible solution than one which would lead Israel to devastation without being able to stop the process.

As for the "Broader Israel" arguments *per se*:

The claim of Jewish “rights” to the Land of Israel is a valid claim and is accepted by the Zionist Left, yet it is limited by reality. Once the Jews gained a sovereign state, their privileged right to *all* the land dissipates in light of the parallel Palestinian right of self-determination in the land remaining. In other words, the Jews' right to a sovereign state cannot be used as justification to oppress Palestinians.

After the establishment of a Palestinian state it is likely that the Jews' aspirations regarding their historical ties with areas within the Palestinian state will continue unabated, just as those of the Palestinians to return home to Haifa and Jaffa have endured – but neither side will be able to realize its aspirations in full. Ultimately, there is no justification to annul the other side's right for our own. Stealing the "poor man's lamb" does not confer a real privilege, it only creates animosity. Moreover, non-recognition of the right of the Palestinians even detracts from the justification of the Jews for their own state, because it violates a principle underlying the Jewish claim; that the principle of "self-determination" is a universal, indisputable principle, including for the Jewish People. Questioning its implementation for the Palestinians will have a boomerang effect upon the Jews and *their* claim of right.

The religious argument is dangerous, as it is fundamentalist with all the negative implications this concept entails. Subordinating political considerations to a vague religious decree is ominously similar to the conduct and claims of radical political Islam. Policy is something to be managed rationally, with a long-term vision, and with considerations connected to reality; not something to be dictated by messianic beliefs that ignore reality.

Messianism has had disastrous consequences in Jewish history, and it should not be allowed to serve as the cause for the demise of the State of Israel.

Indeed, no one knows the will of God, and today's rabbis disagree on the subject. (It is worth noting that Rabbi Ovadia Yosef gave an explicit decision in support of giving up land for peace in the Land of Israel). Therefore, those purporting to speak in the name of religion are mistaken, leading Israel on a downwards path towards a state that determines its course per a narrow fundamentalist approach, in disregard of reality.

The reborn Jewish state could be lost under the spell of a spiritual, messianic claim that cannot be comprehended, proven, or verified, and even lacks an agreed-upon basis in Jewish Law.

This is reminiscent of the Jewish fanatics who set fire to food stores in Jerusalem when besieged by the Romans in 70 AD, in the name of some truth understood only by them.

Taking this argument one step further, it can be argued that rabbinical authorities of the past 150 years have been largely mistaken in their reading of history. Many of them opposed the establishment of the Zionist movement. On the eve of the Holocaust, the imminent catastrophe escaped them. They were not involved in the decision to establish the State of Israel. There is no reason to think that in this context – the conflict with Palestinians over the land of Israel – they might possess any special clairvoyance or deep understanding.

As for the historical claims that a Palestinian people or a Palestinian state never existed – well, these claims are irrelevant, even if they are correct. What matters is what Palestinians are demanding today, as a people, and how the world perceives them. The attempt to draw the debate to an interesting, but irrelevant, question diverts the discussion to an unimportant and wrong avenue.

The Palestinians and the world at large already have decided the question; i.e., that the Palestinians are a people who have the right for self-determination and are deserving of a state. The historical question should be left for academic discussion.

The self-conviction expressed by some right-wingers (in denying Palestinian peoplehood) is ludicrous in view of the global reality; as if by reiterating loudly enough that there is no Palestinian people, the Palestinians will disappear!

Moreover, even if there is evidence that allegedly proves that Palestine has never been an independent state, it is impossible to deny the fact that Palestinians, as human beings, currently live under an immoral occupation. The attempt to determine that they are not a people, or that Gazan Palestinians are distinct from the Palestinians in Jenin, is all-too-similar to colonialist attempts to determine who owns what and what belongs to whom.

Israel pays a price daily for not heeding the international community, and it should be concerned that this price will rise in future; only to finally concede, since not a single state supports its claims. There is no country that believes that the Palestinians, like most other global peoples, should not deserve to realize their right for self-determination in an independent state, or who thinks that Israel has a right to the West Bank.

The argument that there is a ready solution for Palestinians in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is absurd. The Jordanians show no interest in such a solution, at least since 1988, when King Hussein disengaged from the West Bank. Nor do the Palestinians wish to Jordanian citizens. Jordanians and Palestinians may in future negotiate a federation. But only after the establishment of a Palestinian state in Judea, Samaria and Gaza will the Palestinians enter such a negotiation process – on an equal footing, one state opposite another.

The Israeli Right cannot determine that Jordan is the appropriate solution for a Palestinian state, contrary to the opinion of both sides and the rest of the world. It is like suggesting the solution of separate "emirates" in Judea and Samaria, which is supposedly an ideal solution from the perspective of Israel, but has no support in the real world, not among Palestinians nor for the international system. (A similar, earlier experiment with "village associations" in the West Bank failed completely). Wishful thinking is no basis for policy.

The security arguments against establishment of a Palestinian state are indeed serious and must be reckoned with. But it is a mistake to raise the security arguments against Palestinian statehood without providing an alternative, since politics is about choosing between alternatives.

The security issue and the threat that an independent Palestinian state would constitute must be balanced against the threat of bringing into Israel at least three million Arabs who are not enamored with Israel as the Jewish state. Which situation is less risky for Israel and which could be better handled at present and in future?

The current situation shows that even when the territory is under "full occupation," personal safety for Israelis is not guaranteed. There are no Katyusha rocket attacks from the West Bank, but there are stabbings; there

are no underground attacks through tunnels, but there are car-ramming attacks. It is not clear which is worse in the long run.

However, an evacuation of the area would require scrupulous and significant security arrangements, under Israel's responsibility but in continuous cooperation with the US. Unfortunately, there is an irresponsible Israeli tendency to dismiss security proposals devised in collaboration by senior American officers and seasoned Israeli officers. Even if these proposals are flawed, the margins of risk are not significant, and a professional assessment leads to the conclusion that it is correct to take risks of this level for an historic agreement that could bring peace.

In any case, it is a mistake to summarily dismiss the professional advice of the US in security, since the latter's continuous involvement will ensure its material assistance in the event of a violent Palestinian outbreak after the signing of an agreement.

More broadly, we must not ignore the fact that if Israel accepts the views of the American experts and takes the risks entailed in the programs they recommend, the US commitment to Israel's security and to Israel will significantly increase, to Israel's benefit, not only in the Palestinian context. In any case, security arrogance is unjustified and harms Israel's security ties with the largest and most important friend of Israel.

In general, the right-wing exaggerates the dangers that would arise from an independent Palestinian state. Israel is a formidable state and will remain ten times stronger than any Palestinian state to be established. Some of the fears from such a state, even if hostile, are exaggerated, and deliberately magnified as part of an effort to intimidate the citizens of Israel. A demilitarized Palestinian state, even if hostile, will not threaten Israel's existence. The threats to Israel it might create will be handled much better by Israel than those created by the incorporation into Israel of a large and hostile minority population. The latter would be a threat to which there is no real long-term response.

It also seems that the right-wing describes the potential military threat to Israel from a Palestinian state while belittling the demographic threat and manipulating statistics regarding the Palestinian population in Judea and Samaria. Even if you accept the statistics that downplay the size of

the Palestinian population, annexation of the West Bank will undermine Israel's existence as a Jewish and democratic state.

Again, it's clear that a militarily-weak Palestinian state would be much less of a security threat than millions of Palestinians who would live as citizens or foreign residents in the Jewish state if the West Bank were to be annexed to Israel.

One can deduce this from Israel's experience on its northern and southern borders. Israel has had over ten years of quiet from Lebanon – despite Hezbollah threats and its force-building, and two years of quiet from Gaza – despite efforts to dig more tunnels. These two periods of quiet were obtained after military operations that were only mildly successful. So too, Israel can achieve significant periods of quiet against an independent Palestine, even if the regime is hostile to Israel.

On the fringes of the Israeli Left is a group with a Marxist-type worldview which claims that the occupation is largely a result of the economic interests of the army and defense industries, which perpetuate the conflict to maintain their status and increase their profits. It is hard to find many supporters for this view or proof in practice, if only because most current and former IDF officers actually favor establishment of a Palestinian state.

Finally, it is important to note that one-state advocates have little to say about the economic difficulties of absorbing millions of people into Israel whose average incomes are about one-tenth of the average Israeli. Where will funding be found to provide Palestinians with health care, education and personal security needs? Who will pay for this when foreign states cease their contributions to the PA? Even without granting full citizenship to Palestinians, Israel will need to provide all civic services for those Palestinians who are annexed to the state. Israel has no capacity to do so, and the world will not help. Thus, annexation is irresponsible not only in political and security terms, but also in economic terms.

In summary: For a messianic dream and some hills near Nablus, Broader Israel proponents are willing to sacrifice Israel's standing in the world and its democracy and economy too. Annexation would turn Israel into an "apartheid state" which the world will never condone, or into a "binational state" that will be dysfunctional at best and could even lead to

disintegration. All this, for a fundamentalist belief which sanctifies land over life; for the "Land of Israel" at the expense of "the people of Israel."

THE PALESTINIAN STATE APPROACH

Proponents of the division of the land into two states raise a series of moral arguments, with an emphasis on their unwillingness to be "occupiers." But the core argument and motive for most of them is the desire to separate from the Arab world; to build a tall fence between Israelis and the Palestinian Arab masses. In fact, they are driven predominantly by the fear of Arab-Jewish intermingling in the same country, and by the "demographic threat."

What are the main arguments advanced by advocates of the two-state solution?

To begin with, it is said that continuation of the current situation will jeopardize the existence of the Jewish state. Occupation, and certainly the annexation, of two or more million Arabs currently living in Judea and Samaria, will lead to a binational state that will be neither Jewish nor democratic. These are the only two possibilities, and both are disastrous. The wave of Palestinian terrorist attacks that began on the eve of Rosh Hashana 2015 and which lasted for many months is a fraction of the horrific security situation that can be expected in a binational state.

Moreover, history shows that binational states do not survive long when the minority population has no sense of "belonging." This would be especially true in the Israel-Palestine situation where the Palestinian minority will constitute 35 or even 40% of the population. Moreover, this minority has brethren supporting it from across the border, and therefore its strength and potential troublemaking will only grow over time.

All solutions proposed so far by the right-wing to overcome this obstacle seem un-serious, because they would either cause critical damage either to Israel's uniqueness as a Jewish state, or to its democratic character, or both.

This is not just a moral issue (even though morality is extremely important), it is an existential matter. A state so conflicted will ultimately collapse from within. Its military force is irrelevant to such a challenge, since the threat to the nation's character and very existence is internal.

Time is an important element in these considerations, because demographic trends suggest that Israeli Jews will become less than half of the population

residing west of the Jordan River, and the Palestinians will demand a single state, assuredly without any significant Jewish characteristics. In such a situation, the world will not accept that a small majority controls a large minority without full rights and to continue to claim that it is a "democracy." Israel will be censured, as was South Africa at the time, and will be compelled to grant the Palestinians full citizenship and equality. This would mean the end of the "Jewish state."

Israel of today, with its 20% Arab minority, can manage the complex challenge. But when the Arabs will constitute half the population or even a large minority – it will be very difficult to manage this delicate situation.

Arguments About Morality

Every people has the right to self-rule. The ongoing occupation is discriminatory and cruel by nature. It is immoral. It also makes the occupiers wretched, and harms them even when they try to act decently.

The former Head of the IDF Central Command, the formal authority in Judea and Samaria, once said: "We are the world champions in occupation," meaning that Israel manages the occupation professionally and reasonably, with minimal harm inflicted on the occupied population. Yet, from the perspective of the occupied people, and that of human morality in general, there is no such thing as "an enlightened occupation." The very essence of occupation creates a situation of rulers and the ruled, which is evil and immoral. As one Israeli writer has said: "We have become a jailor state." Indeed, any reliable observer would have to conclude that the Palestinians are prisoners, without the ability to free themselves from their awful predicament.

Opponents of the occupation add that, historically, Israel took the bulk of Palestinian land back in 1948, and today further appropriates Palestinian land for West Bank settlements; which is akin to "stealing the poor man's lamb" (as the biblical prophet Nathan once admonished King David). In the past, during the War of Independence, Israel had no choice, says the Zionist Left, which is why Israeli conquests were justified even if brutal. But today Israel has a better choice, which makes the plundering of Palestinians intolerable.

The Social Dimension

The occupation consumes all that is good and destroys Israeli society from within. Soldiers are traumatized by their military service, having had to brutally confront Palestinian civilians, including women and children. There is a loss of morals in the process, and this inevitably has a corrupting influence on Israeli too. Furthermore, occupation goes against the grain of Jewish tradition, and conflicts with the aspirations of Jewish history that Israel will be a light unto the nations. Consequently, regardless of injustice to Palestinians, Israel must rid itself as soon as possible of the occupation.

It is true that the IDF is a disciplined and restrained army which does not conduct itself in the manner of truly brutal armed forces. But even the IDF's supposedly-reasonable conduct is nevertheless problematic. There inevitably is a slippery slope of moral deterioration and brutalization. The resulting "banality of occupation" undermines Israeli society's very foundations.

It is no wonder that, against the background of these weighty arguments regarding the demographic, moral and societal damage wrought by occupation, almost all the previous heads of the Israel General Security Service (the *Shabak*) believe that Israel must withdraw from the territories. This is a heterogeneous group of people who have directly shouldered the burden of the occupation. And they are basically unified in their recommendations, with little nuance. The occupation should end; it is harmful to the Jewish state.

Damage to Israel's International Standing: All international organizations, without exception, deem the occupation patently illegal. For this reason, and due to its immorality, the world does not accept Israeli control over Judea and Samaria, nor will it ever do so. The fact is that no country and no world leader, even among the best friends of Israel, recognize Israeli sovereignty in Judea and Samaria.

In the global reality of the early twenty-first century, no minority in the democratic world is under occupation without being granted full citizenship. In other, less democratic countries, even if the minority is badly treated, they are still citizens, which is not the case in the territories.

Since Israel sees itself as part of the democratic world, it must act in accordance with the mores of this world, and the occupation stands in complete contradiction to these.

If Israel continues to defy international opinion, it will pay a heavy international price, even amounting to a formal boycott of the state. All its relationships will be compromised in the long term. Europe is already working against Israeli interests. A serious newspaper like *The Economist* is raising doubts about Israeli democracy. This is not anti-Semitism, but a value judgment based on international norms.

If the occupation continues, Israel may also lose the support of a large part of the Jewish community in the Diaspora, which is predominantly and which does not accept Israeli justifications for the occupation. There is clear evidence of a growing cleavage between Israel and Diaspora Jewry in this regard, on every university campus and in all serious referenda of American Jewry.

Further down the line, the Israeli economy could also be affected. The labeling of goods and services from settlements (as the EU has mandated) is but the beginning of a rocky road which could lead to the labeling or boycotting of all Israeli products. Israel will be unable to withstand such pressure; it cannot stomach such isolation. The Biblical designation of Israel as "a nation that dwells alone and shall not be reckoned among the nations," was perhaps good for its time. Today, such a dwelling alone would be a disaster.

Furthermore, the absence of an Israeli-Palestinian agreement is the only strategic obstacle that stands in the way of a broad new relationship between Israel and the Sunni Arab world. Because of crisis and upheaval in the Arab world, many Arab nations today seek to work with Israel against common enemies (especially Iran). Israel's ability to cash-in on these new relationships is limited, however, by the lingering occupation. Israel may miss out on a historic opportunity to achieve comprehensive Arab recognition of Israel's right to exist within recognized borders. Crazy aspirations for a "broad" State of Israel that includes the West Bank could ruin Israel's chances for a regional breakthrough.

In sum, the State of Israel is paying an extremely high price for a policy which is bad for Israel and which will be impossible to maintain over time. The only way out is to reach an agreement on the establishment of a Palestinian state neighboring Israel.

CRITICISM OF THE PALESTINIAN STATE APPROACH

Over the proposal to establish a Palestinian state hangs a fundamental question: What is the logic in creating yet another dysfunctional state in the Middle East?

Observers such as former US Secretary of State and National Security Advisor Dr. Henry Kissinger raised this question, and it is an acute issue in current times.

After all, states all over the Arab Middle East are melting down, with many Arab societies proving incapable of meeting the challenges of modernity or democratic rule. On what basis can one assume that a Palestinian state would be any different; any more stable; any less corrupt and dictatorial; any less hostile to its neighbors – than other Arab states in the region?

This question needs be answered before going proceeding towards Palestinian statehood. This is especially true because of the Palestinian expectation that hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees whose lives collapsed in the events of the "Arab Spring" will flock to the new Palestinian state. How will these Palestinians make a living in the already-poor West Bank, and what pressures will this situation put on Israel and Jordan? Doesn't it seem that such a Palestinian state will cause more problems than it solves? In all likelihood, it will prove to be a destabilizing, even explosive, force in the region.

Such a Palestinian state is likely to threaten the independence of Jordan, and at the end of the process could end-up absorbing the Kingdom, which already has a Palestinian majority. The outcome of this will be that after several years, the expanded Palestinian state will traverse a vast area from Iraq to the hilltops overlooking Israel. How does Israel deal with a hostile neighboring country of this size; a state associated with all the troubles we see today in Iraq and Syria? In this situation, Israel would no longer enjoy Jordan as a "buffer state" (that buffers between Israel and the Arab world); but would suffer a "Greater Palestine" as a "transit state" (through which radical forces are transferred to Israel's very doorstep).

As for left-wing arguments against Israeli annexation of the territories: The most irritating and misleading argument of the Left is the social-moral

argument against occupation; i.e., the claim that the occupation “corrupts” people and society. This is demagoguery without foundation.

This “occupation immorality” argument is propaganda which makes cynical use of the concern for justice deeply embedded in Jewish religion, education and culture. Yet this argument has no basis in the present, nor in the history of the people of Israel or of many other nations. After all, no one would argue that the British were less moral than the Germans on the eve of the Second World War, following more than two centuries of British Empire building and occupation around the world.

Moreover, there is no demonstrable evidence that Israel is less moral than it was in 1966, prior to the Six Day War and the subsequent occupation of the territories. The IDF did not change for the worse after 1967; it was just as tough, if not more so, in earlier years.

Take, for example, the tale of *Khirbet Khizeh* (the topic of a novella of the same name by Israeli writer S. Izhar), which details brutal actions taken by Israel in the War of Independence – long before any occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. After nearly fifty years of occupation, it would be almost impossible for such events to occur today. So it can be stated plainly: The IDF of today is far more moral than it was then.

In short, the Left has managed to rally academic support for this assertion of Israeli “occupation immorality” with no substantial supporting evidence. This is perhaps the peak success of the Left, since this is a powerful argument, and it affects every thinking Jewish person.

Moreover, the positing of “occupation immorality” exacerbates Israel's problem with the world, contributing to anti-Semitism and serving the enemies of Israel. It is inherent to the global "Industry of Lies" whose basic goal is to deflate Israel's ability to defend itself and ultimately to deny Israel's existence as an independent Jewish state in the region, with or without the "occupied territories."

Occupation immorality is an artificial argument; a false claim made by seemingly benevolent Israelis, and its adoption is extremely harmful to Israel.

This argument suffers from another major weakness: Even if the Israeli occupation were immoral, ending it will not lead to a moral outcome. On the contrary: It will lead to an immoral, intolerable Palestinian state that will enslave its own people; to another occupation under the rule of a regime that will not respect basic human rights, certainly not for women, not for people of different sexual orientation, nor for non-Muslims, nor for Muslim political dissidents of any stripe.

This is likely to be the sad case whether Palestinians fall under the rule of Hamas, or ISIS, or even someone from the circle of Mahmoud Abbas and his would-be successors. The Palestinian state is going to be a dark and dysfunctional state that violates its citizens' rights. In all probability, it will also be unable to care for their welfare. There is no reason to assume that the new state will make for better government than any other of the very bad Arab governments in the region. And the new state is unlikely to be any better for Palestinians than the current situation of relatively benevolent Israeli occupation.

In other words, the argument about Israel's "immoral" occupation falls to the wayside when one considers the alternative for those who will have to live with the consequences, namely the average Palestinian citizen who will pay a dreadful personal price for establishment of a Palestinian state.

So, this is what is happening: In order to clear their conscience, proponents of Palestinian statehood demand Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, thereby abandoning Palestinian citizens of a future state to a regime that undoubtedly will be corrupt and dysfunctional, and probably bloodthirsty.

In order to divest themselves of "Broader Israel" and the settlers, the left-wing Israeli champions of "morality" are prepared to sacrifice the Palestinians to tyrannical rule, under the cover of beautiful words and liberal-utopian ideas.

If morality were driving the proponents of yet a further division of the Land of Israel, they would care more about their Palestinian neighbors and not cast them under the control of ISIS and the like. Genuine morality requires providing the Palestinians with the best conditions possible, and much to the dismay of many, this is possible only under Jewish rule. It is far more moral to integrate the Arabs living in Judea and Samaria into Israel and gradually and cautiously grant them full Israeli citizenship, than to abandon them to Hamas gangs.

Worse still, when Palestinians discover that their state is nothing but an oppressor-state, they will direct their anger towards Israel – the affluent country immediately next door, established on land they claim was stolen from them in 1948. How will Israel be able to respond to such claims, after having relinquished its own claims of “right” to facilitate establishment of the Palestinian state?

In fact, one already can see this delegitimizing dynamic at play. Some European countries are engaged in the next stage of argument against Israel, by challenging Israel’s dominance of the Negev and championing Bedouin rights.

Security Arguments: Security proposals intended to enable the creation of a Palestinian state suffer from a series of inherent weaknesses. First, generally they are over-optimistic in assumptions about Palestinian willingness to cooperate in fighting terrorism against Israelis. Second, these proposals fail to take sufficiently into account scenarios of extreme instability, such as a Hamas takeover of the Palestinian state through democratic elections, or the fall of the Jordanian regime into the hands of the Muslim Brotherhood or another radical Islamic entity.

Worse still, most proponents of Israeli withdrawal and Palestinian statehood rely in their security proposals on the positioning on foreign forces on Israel-Palestine borders, and particularly in the Jordan Valley.

This is unwise and unworkable in the extreme. Nothing can truly replace the security-effectiveness of the IDF. First, it is unclear how well foreign forces will function. But it is clear that they will possess a much lower level of commitment to defending the Israeli homeland than IDF soldiers do.

Furthermore, the placement of foreign forces – meaning US troops – on Israel’s borders will undermine the basis for Israel’s relationship with the US and the American people. The guiding principle and cardinal rule in US-Israel relations always has been that Israel may request of the US money, sophisticated weapons systems, and assistance in the international arena. But it never has asked for the sacrifice of American soldiers to defend Israel. As President Obama once said: “Israel must be able to defend itself, by itself.”

This principle must not be violated. If Israel errs in this matter, say opponents of the two-state solution, it will start a process whereby Israel will lose its special status in the eyes of the US. This would be a disaster of magnitude that carries far beyond the two-state issue, touching upon and devastating a cornerstone of Israeli strategic thinking and delivering a blow to the core of its national security doctrines.

Israel cannot and must not make such a grand strategic mistake, even for the sake of “solving” the Palestinian issue. The fact that two-state advocates are prepared to consider the placement of foreign forces on Israel’s borders – a mistake of colossal proportions – is evidence of how far into the abyss advocates of this approach are willing to go.

As for “international” argument against annexation, this does not withstand serious legal examination. The international arguments against Israeli control of Judea and Samaria are based on a combination of historical ignorance and disregard of legal documents.

From an historical perspective, the Left ignores manifest truths which completely change how the status of Palestinians in Judea and Samaria should be viewed.

This is the accurate historical record: In 1922, Great Britain gave away almost 80% of the mandate lands entrusted to it by the League of Nations for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish People. It handed these lands over to a Saudi Emir, as compensation for his assistance during the First World War. This is how the Emirate of Transjordan, later the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, was founded.

All problems of the Arabs of the Land of Israel (people who in later years began to call themselves "Palestinians") could and should have been solved in the framework of these lands (which, again, constitute most of the land that was mandated for a Jewish state).

It is therefore impossible and unjust to today seek to wedge national solutions for both Israelis and Palestinians into the remaining 20% of the lands intended for this purpose following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. Between “the river and the sea” (the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea) this won’t work.

Putting aside the punctilious legal and historical debate, it must be stressed that history is sometimes the best judge of reality. The fact is that many countries objected to the UN partition plan in 1947, and yet the State of Israel was established. In 1967 Jerusalem became Israel's united capital; again, over the objection of many. Yet today, no serious international actor demands that Israel withdraw the 1947 partition lines or hand Jerusalem over to an international regime. Time has moved on. History has decided.

Therefore, say opponents of Palestinian statehood, the world eventually will come around to recognizing Israeli rights in Judea and Samaria too – if only Israel can pull itself together in unity and better explain its position.

Alas, the Jewish people in Zion remain divided. Is it any wonder that the world has not accepted Israeli positions? The Left weakens Israel's position in the world, and then bases its arguments for the need to relinquish the heartland of the Land of Israel on this weakness. This is cynicism and hypocrisy.

Supposedly, the weightiest and most convincing argument of two-state solution advocates is that withdrawal from ancestral lands is the only way to maintain the Jewish character of the State of Israel.

Yet isn't ironic that the "Jewish character" of Israel argument is being pushed by those Israelis who are far from religious belief and practice; by those who are opposed to Jewish national identity legislation currently before Knesset; by those who oppose religious legislation in Knesset on core matters like Sabbath and Pesach observance? And conversely, isn't it strange that the most religious and nationalistic Israelis seem the least concerned about the "Jewish character of Israel" argument in the Palestinian state context?

So, it appears that concern for the "Jewish state" expressed by the political Left is in large measure hypocrisy; counterfeit concern that is brandished for left-wing political purposes.

The truth is that political Left is all about racism and hypocrisy. It wants to withdraw from Judea and Samaria and build a big wall between Israel and Palestine so that Israelis will not have to see or interact with Arabs. The political Left is not concerned about the abandonment of Palestinians to a dictatorial Arab regime. Nor does it care about a "Jewish state." It just wants fewer Arabs around.

In fact, the political Left intensely fears Israel being overrun by Arabs, in part because it lacks confidence in its own Jewish identity. Israeli secularists-leftists are unsure of their own children's ability to maintain their religion and distinct nationality within a more diverse society.

As for the demographic dangers inherent in annexation – namely, the integration of Arabs and Jews as equal citizens within a single state – many on the political Right say that for them this is not a problem. They argue that the demographic threat is chimera. The number of Palestinians in the territories is in fact much smaller than official Israeli and Palestinian statistics suggest. There are only 1.5 million Palestinians in Judea and Samaria; not 2.5 million. Annexation is a much smaller risk to take than establishment of a Hamas and Islamic Jihad (if not ISIS) state in the hills of Judea and Samaria.

Thinkers on the political Right will also remind you that, historically, pessimistic demographic predictions about the Zionist effort have never materialized. In 1948, Palestinians fled from war, so prophecies of demographic tsunami were postponed. Then came the mass immigration of Jews from Muslim countries and Europe, delaying doomsday prophecies again. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1989, Israel absorbed a million Jews; another development that the dark prophets of demographic doom did not take into account.

At present, pessimistic demographers are discounting the potential of European Jewish immigration to Israel, as well as potential *aliyah* of Jews from the US if that country falls on hard times.

Pessimistic statisticians also ignore the growing average family size among Israeli Jews, and the decreasing size of the average Israeli Arab family. (In fact, according to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2016 the average number of children per family inside the Green Line was the same for Arabs and Jews: 3.1 children per family. This reflects a significant decrease in fertility among Arabs and a steady increase among Jews).

Overall, it can be said that professional demographers and prognosticators have miscalculated in the past and will do so again in future. What should guide Israel, instead, is the confidence that time is on Israel's side, from economic, military and demographic perspectives. The political Right asks that people stop being so worried about time. Time will march forward in consonance with Israel's bold decisions.

In sum, the political Right that supports Israeli control of Judea and Samaria, and which opposes Palestinian statehood, charges the political Left with relinquishing the Jewish People's "right" to the Land of Israel; of being willing to hand over ancestral lands, the foundation of Israel's existence, to dangerous adversaries; and of wanting to become "Zionists without Zion" out of weariness and from a position of subservient ingratiation towards world leaders who anyway are not enamored with the Jewish state.

To get rid of the territories, the political Left is willing to jeopardize the very existence of the State of Israel. It is willing to withdraw to the Green Line; what Abba Eban once called the "Auschwitz borders." These are indefensible borders. And yet, because of its conflicted and diminishing Jewish identity, the political left is prepared to give up the heartland of the Land of Israel. Alas, the only true value that drives proponents of the two-state solution is short-term convenience for the country on an individual and international level. It is not values or vision.

SUMMARIZING THE DEBATE

The political Left argues that a thorough examination of the Jewish community's decisions since the advent of the Zionist movement proves that when Israel compromises, it succeeds. The classic example of this pertains to the Partition Plan of the UN General Assembly in November 1947. Those who insisted on an "all or nothing" approach were the Arabs, and they lost the battle. The Zionist movement, on the other hand, was prepared to accept compromise, and it won the battle. This principle should guide Israel in the future, too. If Israel insists on everything – on controlling the entire Land of Israel – it will lose everything. Throughout history, Jewish messianic movements that discounted moral issues and were unwilling to compromise led the Jewish People to defeat.

The political Right argues in favor of perseverance. When Israel is persistent and stands steadfast, the other side eventually is forced to accept Israel's position and the realities it creates on the ground. This is the reason why the Arabs of Israel within the Green Line have no illusions about achieving independence from Israel, and they are wary of taking part in terrorism against the State of Israel. Israel must insist on its ancestral lands, for which the Jewish People returned to Zion. Without the "claim

of right," Jews have no legitimacy to be in Israel. The realization of this historic right is justified and even critical from a moral aspect. Certainly, opposition to Palestinian statehood is the only correct approach in terms of security. Israel without Judea and Samaria is a vulnerable country, a temptation for Israel's enemies to pounce.

WHAT SAYS THE WORLD?

It is fair to say that, in general, the world policy community has not delved deeply into the details of the issues in dispute, as discussed in this study. Most observers and leaders have commented only on two aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: On the one hand, categorical condemnation of settlements, and on the other hand, feeble condemnation of Palestinian terrorism and just as feeble a call for Palestinian recognition of the State of Israel.

Beyond this, it seems that most of the (relevant) world actors accept Israel's rejection of the so-called Palestinian "right of return." Most understand that Israel cannot take in huge numbers of Palestinian refugees, although there is some expectation for a humanitarian gesture.

Security for Israel is perceived by most relevant world actors as a real problem. Israel's concerns are considered justified. The widespread violence that has engulfed the Arab world since 2010, and the violence that has ensued since Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, make it clear to many that security is a genuine issue and not an Israeli "excuse." Thus, some of Israel's security demands are accepted by the world (such as the demand for demilitarization of the territories). American negotiators and experts have suggested complex security arrangements that combine technology and foreign troop deployments (including the possibility of US troops), which *in their eyes* might be appropriate and sufficient security alternatives to IDF deployments.

Regarding borders, the position of most international actors is closer to the Palestinian position than to Israel's; i.e., that the 1949 ceasefire lines, the Green Line, should be the basis for a future border between the two countries. This is contrary to Resolution 242 of November 1967, which laid the basis for the "land for peace" formula. That resolution called for Israel's withdrawal from territories occupied in the Six Day War, but not

from *the* territories or all the territories. Everyone accepts the principle of territorial exchange, and almost everyone reasons it should be on a 1:1 ratio – which is not Israel's position.

As for Jerusalem, there seems to be an international consensus that part of the city should become the capital of a future Palestine. There is a general appreciation of complexity regarding the so-called Holy Basin with the Temple Mount at its center. Most world leaders would probably accord with a settlement that upheld unified Jerusalem with international sovereignty in the Old City, where Israel had responsibility for the Jewish Quarter and the Western Wall area, in the context of that sovereignty. It is probable that support could be garnered for a resolution which leaves vague the question of the sovereignty in the Holy Basin, or a resolution in which control of the area would be shared by members of the Arab world (perhaps Jordan) and the world in general (perhaps the UN).

Global opinion seems divided over the Israeli demand that Palestinians recognize Israel as a Jewish state. It is possible that the formula proposed by France will be adopted by the world, as follows: "Israel is the nation state of the Jewish people."

It also appears that many countries of the world will accept Israel's demand that any agreement, when signed, will constitute an end to all claims from either side, and will conclude the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (and perhaps even the Arab-Israeli conflict).

While the world does not accept the legitimacy of Israel's control of Judea and Samaria, there are no serious international actors who demand Israel's unilateral withdrawal without a properly negotiated and signed agreement with the Palestinian Authority. This situation increases the international pressure for negotiations, mainly on Israel, alongside an expectation that all actions that could hinder negotiations and their implementation be abjured. This explains the strong international objections to new Israeli building in Jerusalem and settlement expansion in the West Bank. Settlement building is perceived as an impediment to negotiations, because it deducts from territory that is the subject of the desired negotiations.

CONCLUSIONS

In my opinion, the issue in question will be decided by the Jewish public in Israel on two levels:

- 1. Ideological:** Which principle is more important? One overriding principle is the importance of “ancestral land” – the root and reason for the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel, where Jewish immigration to the land and the reestablishment of Jewish sovereignty is both destiny and the legitimate basis for the difficult Zionist struggle. The other principle is the importance of ending the “occupation,” since it is corrupting and contradicts the essence of Jewish ideals.
- 2. Practical:** What is the lesser evil? One is the “absorption” into Israel of 2-4 million Arabs. The other is the establishment of a state that would never reconcile itself to the existence of Israel and would do its utmost to harm it.

After conducting a detailed and critical assessment of both approaches, we can arrive at the following conclusions:

Proponents of the “broader” Israel approach have no real counter to the “demographic threat” or to the accusation of “apartheid.” The political Right does not sufficiently distinguish between the desirable and the obtainable, between dreams and the real world.

At the same time, and to the same degree, proponents of the two-state approach have no real counter to the dangers of a Hamas or ISIS takeover of the Palestinian state or of Jordan. They have no serious plan for the defense of Israel on the pre-1967 borders. Even the many security figures that support the establishment of a Palestinian state cannot articulate satisfactory solutions to these problems. They fail to separate between professional defense assessment and their – clearly legitimate – politically Left point of view.

At this, we need to consider questions of timing and practicality.

It is almost unanimous in Israel that the “solutions” raised in this study have little practical import in the near term, because Israel has no partner for a negotiated settlement.

Alas, Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas feels he is making good progress in isolating Israel through international fora, such as the General Assembly and the Security Council – without paying any price (since he is not required to make concessions in these channels). Abbas seems unwilling to bear the historical responsibility for any necessary concessions in negotiation, even if this was to achieve major territorial gain.

Moreover, it seems that Abbas is unwilling to bear the responsibility of establishing a state, since once it is established he loses the excuse of the "brutal occupation" that allows the avoidance of the hard, mundane work related to the establishment and management of a state. Without the "occupation" which allegedly prevents him from putting matters in order, he will have to face the many accusations of corruption that surround him; with this corruption being a major obstacle to the development of Palestinian society and state. It is convenient for Abbas to continue with the current situation as a ruler with no real responsibilities.

Abbas' unwillingness to engage in practical state-building was the main reason for his ousting of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, who seriously sought to establish sound institutions for the state-in-making, and refused to cooperate with the corruption built around Abbas.

Abbas' reluctance to engage in negotiation apparently suits the cronies around him, and it is likely that any would-be successor from his entourage will continue on this path. The Palestinian national movement is in crisis, a crisis of leadership and a crisis resulting from the meltdown of Arab nationalism, as reflected in the events of the "Arab Spring." Palestinian nationalism is weaker than that of other Arab countries, which have a much longer tradition of state history. This is the power basis and appeal of Hamas, which integrates the religious motif in its national solution, as do all movements originating in the Muslim Brotherhood.

From the Israeli perspective, especially those set on bringing the conflict to an end, it is important to recognize that many Palestinians have not given up their desire for the elimination of Israel as a Jewish state.

This rejection of Israel is best described by Israeli Arab Knesset Member Hanin Zoabi. Listening to her, one has no choice but to recognize that we are very far from an agreement:

My vision is justice and freedom. I do not want to say through what formula - one or two states. This is a technical question for me. But even if we are discussing two states, neither of them can be a Jewish state. Both must be democratic. We cannot agree with the idea of a Jewish state. The political platform of the party I represent refers to two states - one state for all its citizens, a non-Zionist, non-Jewish state within the 1948 borders, alongside the establishment of a Palestinian state exercising the right of return. If these two democratic states, which have the right of return and Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, would want to develop relations between them and come to an understanding to become as one – this is possible. But I could not agree to a single state and have the settlers and the settlements remain in the West Bank. The right of return, democracies, no legitimacy for Zionism or for a Jewish state - then it will be possible to decide whether these principles are suitable for one state or two states. I do not care which.

Zoabi succinctly formulates what I have heard from Palestinian intellectuals: That the problem for them is the very existence of a Jewish state in the Middle East, not its size or borders.

It seems that at present there is nothing Israel could offer the Palestinians to form the basis for serious talks, let alone to reach a genuine agreement. No serious Israeli would agree to grant the Palestinians something of what they term the "right of return." It is also hard to see an Israeli prime minister giving the Palestinians the Temple Mount or relinquishing most of the settlements; especially when the Palestinians are not prepared to recognize Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people and to enunciate a clear end of all claims – under any circumstances.

Israeli public opinion will not agree to concessions that could lead to a security disaster, such as the security meltdown that followed the Oslo Accords. Only if a leader from the Right reaches an agreement which includes strong security measures – could a deal pass muster in Israeli public opinion.

A sober assessment of the present, and probably of the near future, also indicates that the Palestinian side lacks the necessary foundation for implementation of any agreement; such that even were an agreement signed, it would not hold. In part, this is because Abbas, who is over 80 years old, has no replacement capable of shouldering responsibility in the future. Thus, any agreement that could be signed with him today would be no more than empty words.

When Abbas passes from the scene, the Palestinian side is expected to descend into chaos, after which the PA could fall into the hands of Hamas or worse, the Islamic State. Israel must have practical plans for taking responsibility so that Judea and Samaria will not become like Syria. This seems to be a more practical and imminent challenge than crafting a political agreement with the Palestinians.

A way to prevent this situation runs along the path of regional cooperation. If the Sunni countries that want to maintain the status quo – halting the rise of Iran, the Islamic State, and the rest of the radical Islamic groups – were to unite and create even a loose framework between themselves and Israel with American partnership, then it might be possible to bring the current Palestinian leadership to the negotiating table under this new umbrella. This is sometimes called the “outside-in” approach.

The inside-out approach – namely, reaching an Israeli-Palestinian agreement which might then lead to an improvement in relations between Israel and Sunni states – has been proposed and has failed repeatedly for nearly two decades. In fact, this latter approach has served as a bar to true peace, because it accords outsize importance to the Palestinians and thus swells their stubbornness. As of today, this approach is no longer appropriate to the situation in the region.

Since there seems no practical way to renew Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at present, the strongest and most relevant argument of the Left is that settlement activity hinders the possibility of future negotiations. This is also the main argument voiced by global actors. I think that if the Israeli government reaches a future agreement with the Palestinians, which is approved by the Knesset and by a referendum, it will be possible to conduct almost any necessary evacuation of settlements in Judea and Samaria.

Yet at the same time, the extent of necessary evacuation could be so massive that no government would agree to take responsibility for its implementation. Therefore, the continuation of settlement construction without limits as to location and pace of construction indeed could kill the chances for future negotiations. But since this is exactly what the right-wing wants to achieve – to eliminate of any chance for negotiations leading to a two-state solution – it is therefore unmoved by this demand.

UNILATERAL INITIATIVES MUST BE REJECTED

The current situation can correctly be described as a standstill accompanied by terrorism of one form or another; suicide bombings in 2001-04, and sporadic stabbing and gun shooting in 2016. Terrorism continues without relation to the existence or non-existence of a diplomatic negotiating process.

Yihye Ayash, a leading Palestinian terrorist who was active after the signing of the Oslo agreement, operated with Arafat's approval even while Rabin and Peres were conducting intense negotiations with Arafat.

Even periods of security quiet are only seemingly quiet. Mainly this is a function of the success of Israel's General Security Service and the IDF in thwarting terrorism, not of a Hamas decision to refrain from terrorist activity.

Therefore, it is no wonder that many in Israel feel a sense of despondency. The distressing situation and the inability to point to a good way forward, result in various half-baked proposals to take "partial steps" or "interim measures" that might lead to a distant, better future. Alas, a close look at these interim proposals shows that they offer not a single solution to a single problem or the real mitigation of even one difficulty.

Proponents of the Palestinian state approach suggest that, even though it is impossible at present to reach a comprehensive solution, Israel should "advance" towards this outcome in measured steps, whether by agreement or in unilateral fashion.

It seems that proponents of Palestinian statehood are willing to pay a very high price for little progress; namely, taking small steps towards independent Palestinian statehood regardless of the cost, particularly a rift in Israeli society.

It is clear to me that unilateral Israeli actions, such as withdrawals towards the outline of future Palestinian state borders or settlement withdrawals, will not decrease in any way the assaults on Israel's legitimacy and morality that so concerns adherents of this approach. Moreover, such a move will give a boost to terrorism. When Jews flee, it is easier, practically and psychologically, to attack them from behind, as compared to when they are securely rooted in the land.

In short, unilateral Israeli withdrawals will be very costly in domestic terms, with few gains in the international or Palestinian terms. It is worth remembering that before the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza (the "expulsion," as it is termed by the political Right), advocates of the move claimed that the withdrawal would garner world empathy for Israel, something that may have been true for a mere few months.

On the other side of the political divide, the political Right's unilateral proposals are no better. The proposal to apply Israeli law or sovereignty over Area C, without first determining what a final agreement for the entire West Bank will be, is nonsensical. This move would exact difficult costs in every area of Israel's relations with the world. Some will push for harsh decisions against Israel, even the expansion of the boycott against Israel. Israel will not gain a thing from a unilateral annexation of Area C except for good feelings among the settlers and their sympathizers. In practical terms, this action will have very little positive effect even on the Israelis living in this area, and it may lead to serious negative effects.

Annexation of Area C and/or other parts of the West Bank also will erase the distinction Israel has made between Jerusalem (which was annexed to Israel in 1967) and the rest of the territories. Israel has a unique, strong claim on Jerusalem. It is the capital of Israel, not just another "settlement." Thus, Israel has acted to build freely in the greater Jerusalem envelope and has rejected global censures of its development in Jerusalem. Jerusalem cannot be compared to outlying hilltops in the West Bank hinterland. But if Israel annexes Area C, this distinction – which has been important in developing Jerusalem – will be erased.

The world will not accept Israeli clarifications and will act under the assumption that the true purpose of annexation of Area C is elimination of all chances for a negotiated comprehensive settlement. Everyone will understand that this is a step towards a binational state under a different name. This move will be perceived as an act of cheating; a contradiction of the declarations by Israel's prime minister in support of negotiations towards two state for two peoples. If Israel is driving towards a binational state solution (and this document lays out the benefits as well as the downsides of such a move), Israel should act clearly and not underhandedly.

In my humble opinion, unilateral withdrawals and unilateral annexations would be major mistakes. Israel should not make any unilateral moves at all, but rather manage the conflict until conditions improve for a renewed negotiating effort at an agreed-upon solution. When on the edge of a cliff, standing still is preferable to stepping forward.

This is also why Israel is correct to reject French and other international proposals for newfangled negotiating frameworks. Many of these ideas are disconnected from reality. It is all too easy for those who led the colossal blunders in Libya and Iraq to surmise that they know how to bring about Israeli-Palestinian peace. They will not be the parties to pay the price should their proposals be misguided.

This has always been true and is even truer today, when the entire Middle East has been overtaken by storm, and the processes of change it is undergoing are leading to endless wars and mass tragedies, even to genocide.

Compared to other people in the Middle East, the situation of Palestinians is undoubtedly better than that of most of their Arab brethren. In view of the circumstances, including deep divisions among Palestinians themselves; the fragility of any Palestinian entity sandwiched between Israel and Jordan; the absence of a responsible leadership and stable state institutions; and more – the making of hasty and wrenching decisions could lead to disaster.

For all these reasons, Israel's focus today should be (beyond the improving of Palestinian living conditions) preparation for the possibility of Palestinian Authority meltdown in a post-Abbas era. Israel also should try to study the causes for the last wave of terrorism and learn how to mitigate the popular impulses for terrorism that are partly the outcome of Palestinian incitement.

It also is important to find ways to overcome the sense in many world capitals that Israel is deceitful when it announces its desire for negotiations, because in parallel it closes off options for future negotiations by building settlements.

In any case, it seems certain that any attempt to broker a deal between the parties at this time would fail, due to the deep disparities between them and the likelihood that a Palestinian state would be a failed state at best. This is not the time for an experiment that will fail, since failure will cause utmost damage.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Palestinian statehood is not the real question at hand. Establishment of a Palestinian state is impractical and unwise for the near future, and is even dangerous due to the conditions that currently pertain in the Middle East. The Arab world is in a state of violent chaos that requires effective Israeli control of the West Bank.

The real question before decision-makers, rather, is whether Israel aspires to leave open the possibility of future negotiations towards a two-state solution, or whether it will act to close off this option by expanding settlements and entering an unstoppable process towards a binational state.

In any case, unilateral initiatives on Israel's part would be a serious error. Both unilateral annexations and unilateral withdrawals would be a major mistake. Unilateral moves in either direction will entail a very high price for Israel in domestic terms, while earning Israel very few gains in diplomatic and defense terms.

Any of the approaches discussed in this study will pose significant challenges to Israel's future. Therefore, it is important to embark on a diplomatic approach that can gain as broad a consensus as possible within Israeli-Jewish society. In fact, the extent of societal consensus is more important than the specifics of any approach or agreement reached. It is critical to maintain the resilience of Israeli-Jewish society to resist pressures in the future. The supreme danger is the creation of a rift within Israel.

It is therefore critical that a significant majority of Israelis – as large a consensus as possible – unite behind whatever approach is opted for by Israel's leadership, in order to prevent a schism in the country.

Some observers allege that what is lacking is "leadership" for a drive towards peace with the Palestinians. Alas, this term has become a code word for concession to Palestinian demands and for international pressures on Israel led by the Israeli Left. It is as if "leaders" who acquiesce to Palestinian demands and who might establish a Palestinian state embody "leadership" more than those who might decide to proceed slower or faster towards a binational state.

I reject this assertion, and suggest moving away from a false discussion of “leadership” – which is convenient for the Left but unfounded in reality – and to discuss the alternatives themselves. The realization of any approach discussed in this study will in fact require leadership. And maintaining unity and reaching consensus within Israel will require the grandest leadership of all.

The pro-settler Right, and the hard Left that denies Jewish rights in the Land of Israel, are two factions on opposite sides of the spectrum of Israeli society. In between, at the center of Jewish society in Israel, is a large majority that desires a solution and is quite ready to compromise on its rights over vast areas of the Land of Israel. But it will do so only in return for an agreement that will ensure the security and peace of the country; and in a situation where the Palestinian minority does not grow beyond its current share of the population.

The only politically feasible way to act on this readiness in the future – which I repeat is unrealistic at present – is by limiting Israeli building to the settlement blocs (or to the existing boundaries of settlements, as was recently agreed between Israel and the Trump administration), thus reserving the remaining area for discussion at a time when there might be a different Palestinian leadership.

At the same time, Israel must not jeopardize its existence by embarking on rash unilateral initiatives that would radically worsen its security situation – just to please proponents of “forward progress” at any cost. This risk is not worth taking.

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